

Resources

Researching the Fiji Coups

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The two Fiji coups of 1987 and the ensuing crisis have generated an enormous historiography of their own: more than a dozen or so books and monographs, scores of scholarly articles, and hundreds of popular periodical pieces. No other event in contemporary Pacific Islands history has caused as many words to be printed or provoked as heated a controversy as the events in Fiji. After the Fiji coups, the Pacific Islands will never be viewed in quite the same light again.

For all the unprecedented outpouring of words, important gaps in our knowledge of what happened still remain. None of the protagonists on either side of the political divide, except Sitiveni Rabuka, has published a full account of their role in the coups and subsequent events, beyond issuing self-serving statements exonerating them of any misdeeds or political opportunism. Important correspondence establishing linkages or motivations is probably lost forever already or will not become available to researchers for years to come. What was the tone and tenor of the conversation between the Queen and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau in the first few days of the crisis? What words were exchanged between Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka during a Sabbath game of golf a week before the coup? What was said on the Fijian radio to rally the wavering *tauvei* behind the coup? Who was really behind the attempt to smuggle vast quantities of arms into Fiji in 1988?

The simple response to these ques-

tions is that we will never quite know for certain, although by piecing together vast amounts of scattered information already available we may be able to construct a reasonably accurate picture of at least some aspects of the crisis. This brief guide to sources and to the available literature on the subject is offered to meet that end. Needless to say, this is just a beginning, and we are writing in full knowledge that there must be sources that we have overlooked or not known about. It is our hope that researchers will bring omissions to our attention and enable us to keep as comprehensive a guide as possible to facilitate research on this milestone event in contemporary Pacific Island affairs.

SOURCES IN FIJI

The most obvious place to begin is Fiji itself, where some quite important sources of information can be easily identified.

Interviews

Interviews with politicians, public servants, and others privy to the dynamics of the unfolding events from different vantage points yield a rich harvest of anecdotal and in some cases documentary evidence. Although some of the politicians have died or left the country, most are still in Fiji; some are willing, even eager, to tell their side of the story. Organizations such as the Labour Coalition, the Tauvei Movement, the Fiji Trades Union Congress, the Methodist church, the Fiji Council of Churches, and the Back to Early

May Movement have important documents in their possession.

Newspapers

The two local dailies, *Fiji Times* and *Fiji Sun*, were shut down by the military for a week after the first coup, but from then until the second coup, on 25 September 1987, they provided extensive coverage of events in Fiji and thus contain a mine of information. Opposing factions talked to—or rather at—each other through the print media, especially in the open columns, which provide invaluable insights into the thinking and emotions engendered during this tumultuous period. *Shanti Dut* (Hindi) and *Nai Lalakai* (Fijian) carried the news and commentaries to non-English-speaking peoples of the two dominant ethnic groups in Fiji.

The *Fiji Times* continues to publish under self-imposed censorship, while the *Fiji Sun* closed down after the second coup. A new paper, *Fiji Post*, edited by Rabuka biographer Stan Ritova, is a vehicle for essentially pro-interim government views.

Published Official Sources

The Ministry of Information's daily press releases are important for official response to and assessment of events and contrary opinion. The *Fiji Royal Gazette* (now the *Republic of Fiji Gazette*) is an important indicator of movement in the civil service through appointments, promotions, and resignations. Annual department reports register changes in personnel and productivity and provide glimpses into the performance of the economy and the different branches of the government.

The National Archives of Fiji

The National Archives are a rich repository of material on current developments in Fiji. In particular, the archives have a fairly full collection of the hundreds of submissions made to the Constitutional Review Committee of 1987 as well as its final report (Parliamentary Paper 21). Excerpts of submissions were widely published in local Fiji newspapers, which are also collected for preservation by the archives. Many of the responses to the Draft Constitution floated by the Republic of Fiji are also housed there. These submissions, from a wide variety of viewpoints, constitute a vital source in understanding events in Fiji.

The USP Library

The University of the South Pacific Library has excellent Fiji holdings in its Pacific Collection. The library has an index to the *Fiji Times* that would be very useful and has also created clipping files on the coups. These cover the periods of 14–31 May, 2–30 June and 1–14 October 1987 and include articles from newspapers in Fiji, the South Pacific region, Australia, New Zealand, and London. The librarians at USP kindly shared photocopies of these files with us, and we found them extremely interesting as both a measure of opinion and a source of interviews with key figures.

SOURCES OUTSIDE FIJI

Soon after the first coup, a number of pro-Coalition (and anticoup) organizations sprang up in metropolitan countries with significant links to Fiji. Some of the organizations have disappeared

with the passage of time, inertia, or lack of financial support, but others are still active, making submissions to the constitutional review committees in Fiji, publishing their own literature, facilitating conferences, and generally acting as pressure groups to effect changes in policy. Among the more prominent of these are (or have been):

Canadian Committee for Democratic Rights in Fiji, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

International Movement for Democracy in Fiji, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

Uniting Church World Mission, Sydney, NSW, Australia.

National Committee for Restoration of Democracy in Fiji, New Delhi, India.

Movement for Democracy in Fiji Limited, Sydney, NSW, Australia.

Coalition for Democracy in Fiji, Wellington and Auckland, New Zealand.

Fiji Independent News Service, Sydney, NSW, Australia.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE

The Fiji coups attracted a great deal of attention, especially in the British Commonwealth (United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and India) and in the islands of the South Pacific. Both print and electronic media in the metropolitan countries carried a sustained and extensive coverage of and commentaries on the events in Fiji. The tapes and transcripts of the broadcasts constitute an important source of information for any researcher. The transcripts of Radio Australia's International Program, available through Australian embassies

and consulates, are indispensable in providing a day-by-day coverage of the crisis at a time when the local media were muzzled or operating under heavy censorship. The transcripts provide fascinating glimpses of the confusion and chaos that surrounded the reporting of the unfolding events. For a while, Radio Australia was the only outside source of hard information in Fiji, its importance underscored by the unsuccessful attempt of security forces to confiscate short-wave radios shortly after the May coup.

All the major metropolitan national newspapers (*Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Australian*, the *Melbourne Age*, the *New Zealand Herald*, the *Guardian*, the *Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*) carried extensive and frequently comprehensive coverage of the events for long periods of time. A small sampling of some of the newspapers is provided below, but it is very small indeed. Coverage in the United States can be traced through indexes to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*; such indexes are readily available in major libraries.

The (Australian) Department of Parliamentary Library's Current Information Section has two excellent compilations of Australian newspaper articles and editorial commentaries on the first and second coups that could serve as a starting point for further research in the newspapers. These are titled *Editorials and Selected Press Comments on the Fiji Coup (May 27, 1987)* and *Editorial and Selected Press Comments on the Second Coup in Fiji: Before and After (October 13, 1987)*. For a commentary on the coverage of the Fiji coups in the US media, a beginning can

be made with Glen Alclay and JoAnn Wypijewski's paper, "US Media Bias in Coverage of Fiji Coups."

Among magazines that published and still publish extensive material on the Fiji crisis (including interviews with leading protagonists), the following are especially noteworthy and can be ignored only at great cost to the researcher: *Islands Business*, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the *Bulletin*, the *Economist*, *New Zealand Listener*, and *New Zealand Outlook*. (Because of the ready availability of the first two magazines and the enormous amount of coverage they gave to the coups, articles from them are not included in the bibliography that follows.)

In addition to these, some specialized publications contain useful current economic and political information that enables a deeper analysis of some of the trends in Fiji before and after the coups. Among the most important of these are:

South Sea Digest This fortnightly Sydney-based regional publication provides a regular and reliable digest of statistical information on the performance of the island economies and on important developments generally.

Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Country Reports This London-based quarterly not only provides a comprehensive and reliable survey of the macroeconomic indicators (GDP, CPI inflation, debt and debt service, main exports and their destination), but also contains incisive short overview essays on current developments.

Washington Pacific Report, which describes itself as the "Insiders Newsletter Highlighting the Latest Develop-

ments of Interest Involving the Insular Pacific," provides a reliable guide to official Washington thinking and policies on events in the region, including Fiji.

Wellington Pacific Report, the irregularly published, antipodean ideological counterpart of the Washington publication, is edited by peace activist Owen Wilkes. Its special issue on the Fiji coup—Wellington Confidential—highlighted alleged American involvement and connections.

Pacific Report, edited by Helen Fraser, is a fortnightly newsletter out of Australia with fine coverage of "politics, business and development in the region."

The Centre for South Pacific Studies at the University of New South Wales, under the directorship of Grant McCall, publishes a *Newsletter* that lists Pacific-related conferences and events in Australia and New Zealand.

Fiji Voice is a pro-Coalition publication sponsored by the Sydney-based Fiji Independent News Service under the direction of former South Australian Premier, Don Dunstan. Now published somewhat irregularly, it was for many months after the coups the major source of hard information on activities in Fiji that was often not published in the country itself.

Davui, published by the Movement for Democracy in Fiji, is a more recent ideological soul mate of *Fiji Voice*.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE FIJI CRISIS

What follows is a selection of scholarly and popular publications that deal directly with the Fiji coups and subsequent developments. We have not

included here extensive published literature on the recent history and politics of Fiji that may provide a context for discussion of the coups. Three useful, quick surveys are: Michael Taylor (editor), *Fiji: Future Imperfect?* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue); Brij V. Lal (editor), *Politics in Fiji: Studies in Contemporary History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin/Honolulu: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1986) with contributions on the evolution and structure of Fiji politics, including the formation of the Fiji Labour Party; and Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: A Short History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin/Honolulu: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1984), which is strong on the nineteenth century.

Many research libraries and major public libraries have available database searching, which improves considerably upon the manual examination of indexes and abstracts. For our listing we used a service known as Infotrac, which provides a database of articles from popular periodical literature (largely American). We double-checked this through a search of the database of *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* on compact disk. We searched the *Social Science Index* database on compact disk and searched, via the Dialog system, the databases for *Social Sciences Citation Index* and *Public Affairs Information Service*. We also received assistance from the National Library of Australia, which kindly provided a search of the *Australian Public Affairs Information Service* on-line index. The National Library of New Zealand graciously provided a search of Index New Zealand (INNz) and New Zealand Bibliographic Network (NZBN). Selected items from all of these

sources appear in the bibliography, which attempts to put together citations for material that might not be immediately known to those attempting research on the momentous events in Fiji. We do not pretend that this bibliography is complete, and we urge readers to send in citations. Please note that in some entries data may be missing (e.g., pagination); we felt that it was more productive to include such items than exclude them, as in every case enough data is present to make retrieval possible.

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